

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Bernie Mooney
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Children and Families
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Paul Boyce, Director of Children's Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to her portfolio.

1 VULNERABLE CHILDREN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

I want to use my report to Council to provide Members with an update on our Improvement programme within children's services. We have been unequivocally clear – delivering excellent children's services for every young person in our borough is hugely important, it is our number one priority.

Turning around such complex services is not easy. It takes time, dedication and no small measure of expertise. That is exactly what we have got in our teams now, and it is making an impact.

Ofsted, our independent advisor, and everyone who has worked with us on this Improvement Journey can see the progress. They can see more stable services, more robust performance management and – crucially – safer children.

I am proud of the work we have done, I am pleased it has been recognised by Ofsted, but I am under no illusions that there is still work to do. We will deliver, and I promise to keep all Members informed as we continue to improve.

You can read more about these developments in the [Liverpool Echo](#) and in the [Wirral Globe](#).

I am pleased Ofsted have also recognised the work the council has done to recruit more permanent social workers and highlighted "improved stability" within the department.

To build on this progress, we have launched a dedicated microsite to recruit permanent social workers. This website, supported by a major campaign, will help us attract high calibre social workers to permanent positions within our social care teams. It is about showcasing all that is good about working at Wirral Council. I hope to report to Council in the coming months another major surge in the numbers and standards of social workers employed in Wirral.

Members can see the new website here: <https://www.wirralsocialcarejobs.co.uk/>

Members will be aware that we continue to do all we can to recruit families to become foster carers and adopters. I want to thank the many families who give up their time and their homes to support a vulnerable young person, and encourage every Member in this Chamber to help us as we make sure every child in our care has the chance to live in a safe, loving, supportive home.

In November, we launched a new foster carer recruitment campaign. The 'big heart' campaign is calling on residents from all walks of life to find space in their home and in their heart to provide local homes for local children who need it most. There are more than 830 children in care in Wirral and we need least 40 families to step forward to help us look after them. With so many myths around who can and who can't foster, it can be hard to make that decision, but the truth is, almost anyone can apply!

A new website is also live and will provide all the information prospective carers may need to help them decide if fostering is right for them. Click [here](#) to see the new website and read more in the [Wirral Globe](#).

Finally, I am delighted to inform Council of some exciting news in our work to support children with disabilities. A major new project involving Wirral Council and Wirral-based charity Autism Together will be given almost £100,000 to use 'wearable technology' to help some of the most vulnerable people in the borough.

The world-first scheme, pioneered by Autism Together, will use 'biometric sensors' in the form of lightweight wristbands – similar to the popular fitness trackers such as Fitbit – to help understand those with severe autism who may otherwise find it difficult to communicate.

The council was chosen in a competitive process to receive funding from NHS Digital, as part of a project managed by the Local Government Association. They were looking for innovative ideas for how technology could help shape the future of social care.

The wearable sensors will allow researchers to spot the signs leading up to severe incidents of anxiety so they can be reduced or avoided in future, by keeping track in real time of changes in factors such as skin temperature, sweat, heart rate and movements.

Read more in the [Wirral Globe](#).